



South Australian Division

President's report to RAAF Association (SA Division) AGM Saturday 24th of October 2020.

Since last year's AGM the Council has conducted its business on your behalf with diligence. Its April meeting was by an electronic connection; all others have been "face to face", but appropriately distanced. This has been a challenging year for all, and the Council has had some additional challenges. We have not always worked harmoniously, focussing on a common goal. Our Mission and aims are, however, clearly outlined in our "plan on a page" derived from the strategic planning meeting early in 2019.

The Council has had tension between those preoccupied with a need to debate issues previously resolved and decided upon, and others wishing to move forward. We have repeatedly debated the need to refer to an auditor in our constitution and have questioned whether to have a formal sub-lease with the Combined ex-service mess CESM. The election to Council last October of Greg Weller was questioned despite his record as our most energetic, forward thinking and engaging member. The working group, looking at changes to our constitution that we shall consider shortly, was criticised as being too hastily presented as long ago as April.

I have not led your Council feeling that I had its total support. On occasions I have considered resignation or of not accepting nomination today. Fortunately, in recent week, I have seen strong expressions of support for our common purposes. I shall therefore, with some confidence, be honoured to continue for a further year.

EFC Centenary. Our AGM last October, in the EFC year, still had a most important commemoration to complete its recognition. The landing in Darwin on 10 December 1919 was appropriately recognised in Creswell gardens at the site of Ross Smith's statue by Air Force, the City, State, History Trust SA and by our Association. The success enjoyed by the numerous EFC events, displays and publications, as co-ordinated via its organizing committee, has led to forming a similar committee this year to prepare for AF2021. Greg Weller's industry in this regard, with Dave Helman last year, is gratefully acknowledged.

COVID-19. A world-wide pandemic from a novel corona virus, causing what is now called COVID-19, has dramatically changed what we have been able to do in 2020. Every commemoration has been savagely minimised or even cancelled. Anzac Day, almost the first casualty, was "lit up" at dawn in our driveways, and services streamed by TV (not always complete or on time). The Air Force "birthday" on the 31st of March had already been cancelled; then on August the 13th the "Royal" anniversary was cancelled, as providing refreshments while seated would have been very awkward. Commemorations of VE Day (on 5 May) and VP Day (15 August) were attended by selected invitees only. We were surprised, though grateful, that the RSL took over as host, as in recent years the recognition of VP Day has been a RAAFA initiative. The Bomber Command and Battle of Britain commemorations, on the 30th of May and 12th of September, with limited attendances, were splendidly orchestrated by the RAAF. We were delighted to be designated co-hosts. Veterans SA was the organiser of the moving ceremony at the Dardanelles Cenotaph, Australia's first WW1



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memorial, on September the 6th, close to “wattle day” of the year in which it had been dedicated ,1915.

Council Changes. Lee_Bowes resigned after the March meeting of Council to concentrate on his important work with DFWA and with the CESM. The casual vacancy, caused by Lee’s resignation, was filled by appointment of SQNLDR Craig Keane CSC at the “electronic meeting” on the 20th of April. Craig had previously been a regular “observer”. It is splendid to have a younger, permanent serving member to help guide our future. It will be most pleasing, later in this AGM, to welcome another, WOFF David Pyatt. Craig, unfortunately, will be posted in December and be no longer available. I acknowledge both his and Lee’s strong commitment to progressing Division business.

Dave Helman resigned as Secretary, Public Officer and Finance subcommittee (FSC) member after receiving the FSC/Brisan report in July (see below). Warwick Raymont agreed to act as minute secretary in July and was appointed Secretary to fill both the Secretary and Public Officer vacancies in September. Warwick’s ready acceptance of these and other positions is very much appreciated. He joined the FSC when Bill Chappell relinquished that position. He has also been a RAAFA appointment to the CESM committee for several years. And he willingly joined both the Defence Consultative Group, (DCG), and the constitution working group (CWG).

We will say “farewell, and many thanks” to three stalwarts who leave the Council today: Bill Chappell, Arthur Jeeves and John Stapleton. Between them they have served your Council for nearly five decades, almost all in one or other executive position. Bill has been a Vice-President during ten of his over 16 years as a Councillor; John has been Treasurer for three years of his more than eight; Arthur, appointed July 2004, has, since 2006, been Secretary, Assistant Secretary and most recently Vice-President. He has also been our Public Officer. All three have been members of the Finance Subcommittee. Bill has edited our newsletter, variously named. Their wise counsel, corporate knowledge and experience will be missed. We hope that they will remain in touch to see that we do not stray from a suitable path.

Employment Agreement. As part of a review of finances by Brisan, an accountancy firm engaged in our MYOB system, some irregularities were identified in relation to overtime, long service leave etc. for our Administrative Officer Annette Moore. Annette has been the backbone of our office administration and general organisation, so this came as a shock. The subsequent report to Council by members of the Finance Subcommittee (FSC) was released after an interval of months without including two FSC members. These irregularities, created by the emergence of an Act, The Commonwealth Fair Work Act, three years after Annette’s appointment, have been remedied. They have not yet, however, been ratified by Council, pending unanimous acceptance of the words in an employment agreement. The implications of the report, released without notice to those affected, caused much hurt and may have been a factor in the Secretary’s resignation. This oversight, of many year’s duration, has been partly corrected to the satisfaction of those concerned. It is regretted that its discovery by an independent body and subsequent notification to Council proved to be so divisive. The



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complete report, previously marked “Confidential” has been distributed to branches and to the National AFA President, Carl Schiller CSM OAM and Secretary., Peter Colliver OAM.

Constitutional Amendments. There have been contentions and problems in the interpretation of many of the clauses in our constitution. I have referred to some of these, such as the inclusion of Auditors, and nomination of Councillors. Clarification seemed desirable. We have been unable to appoint vacancies that exist after an AGM, a problem that might recur today. We are concerned that, with a need for ACNC Recognition as a charity, more emphasis on our charitable purposes was desirable and less on our (money generating) powers. We have also recognised that the AFA National Board is keen to align more closely the constitutions of State and Territory Divisions. The time was ripe for a deep review. Councillors have contributed to the various changes even as late as a few days ago and further changes suggested. The list that you have been sent has been endorsed by Council with just a few exceptions, as will be explained later. I acknowledge the great work that members of the CWG have done. Greg Weller and Warwick Raymont joined me with Kevin Gogler, Mitcham Secretary. Kevin’s professional experience with Constitutions, Acts and regulations has been invaluable. He has prepared the summary list for us and the full version of the constitution with amendments. As these changes have been drafted the Joint Board Steering Group (JBSG, v.i.) chairman, Jim Campbell, chose a few weeks ago to distribute South Australia’s proposal to other Divisions as an example or model to be emulated. The AFA Board and JBSG, at a combined meeting, did suggest alternative sections with respect to “Objects” and to “Membership Classes”.

Our Relationship with the Combined Ex-Services Mess. It may surprise many of you that this has been a contentious matter. The Mess has existed since soon after the RAAFA moved two decades ago from Finnis Street, where it had its mess and bar, to the Torrens Parade Ground. The CESM was set up by the three ESOs then resident, with capital input from each. Part of the area leased by the RAAFA was agreed to be the most suitable for the Mess. Our members were granted free membership of CESM SA, a separate incorporated structure, and a RAAFA member would preside on its committee. In concession the CESM has never been required to pay a commercial rent. But it has injected into our finances a considerable sum of funds, though in diminishing quanta in recent years, as the number of CESM activities has decreased. This financial benefit has somehow been construed in recent Council discussion as a detriment. Our relationship must remain strong. But in delving into this issue we have realised that a second three-year Memorandum of Understanding, MOU, is now well overdue for review. On two previous occasions, over several years, your Council has rejected the idea of a sub-lease in favour of a MOU. A new MOU will be negotiated between the new CESM Committee and a new RAAFA SA Council.

Relationship with RAAF Edinburgh. This is also a strong one and very much appreciated. Greg Weller is our link and RAAF’s Community engagement Director. His command and organisation of serving members has been of immeasurable value for all commemorative events. Though many have been smaller this year the necessary tasks and co-ordination have been considerable. In turn we have greatly valued the friendship and assistance from



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SADFO AIRCDRE Brendan Rogers CSC CSM as we did from his two predecessors. We shall welcome a new SADFO, AIR CDRE Ross Bender, at the end of this calendar year and wish AIRCDRE Rogers well for his transition into the civilian and professional community of SA.

AFA National Board and Joint Board Steering Group JBSG. While not specifically relevant to SA these two bodies have involved much work for Greg Weller and me. The JBSG is a “think tank” that has developed ideas for both the harmonisation and transformation of our Australian Association. We must modernise and become more relevant to current and recent serving members. The RAAF itself has been more closely engaged: the CAF is a member; WOFF Air Force Fiona Grassby is a Board member as is Sharon Bown, Reserve Nursing Officer, now Vice President. We need to have programs to achieve our aims more efficiently. An Air Force Association Foundation is planned. A new and improved AFA National web site has been launched (SA needs to remain up to date, as it has); constitutional alignment is progressing; an Air Force Alumni proposal may help.

Conflict of Interest, Privacy Policy, Finance Subcommittee, Governance. These matters have not been addressed assiduously in the past. They have been partly addressed over the last twelve months. We do have a conflict of Interest policy. Other matters referred to above will be progressed by the new Council. Those elected may expect to find themselves on a subcommittee or two.

Advocacy, Assistance, Camaraderie and Commemoration. These four are the “legs” or tasks we have set in supporting the wellbeing of the Air Force Family, as listed on our one-page brochure. We can put a tick in the last three boxes though we in turn must acknowledge support from the RAAF itself (for Commemoration) and from the CESM (Camaraderie). Nationally, the “Advocacy” matter has been addressed in two major inquiries: the Cornall report (Advocacy) and the Productivity Commission inquiry (Rehabilitation and Compensation). Our Pension claim work, under the VEA, has almost ceased as WW2, Korea and Vietnam veterans have been assisted to complete their claims. But we have not provided ATDP trained practitioners for MRCA or DRCA. The DVA and Minister have decided, in the recent Budget, to accept some of those reports’ recommendations; but not for legally trained “in house” advocates; nor have ESOs agreed on how otherwise to activate a nationwide inclusive system. But we have been involved in advocacy to those inquiries and to Government departments at State and Federal level. These activities are referred to below. In reference to “Assistance” your Council has contributed financial assistance to two projects in the last year: a grocery delivery “COVID” programme organised by the Ex-Military Rehabilitation Centre near Edinburgh, (which recently was badly affected by fire), and financial support to the family of a serving RAAF member with serious health problems as a new baby is expected. We have deflected a request for legal aid, another for travel expenses, and have referred to Legacy a widow’s financial problem. Such requests have the potential to overwhelm our Division’s resources. Both the merit of the request and its relevance to our “charitable purposes”, as defined in our constitution, are important in making such decisions.



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Veterans' Health Advisory Council, (VHAC), Veterans SA and the Consortium. Among matters considered by the VHAC I have joined a subcommittee to consider suitable names for the partially reactivated "Repat". And we have discussed the development of its Veterans' Wellbeing centre. Although represented at the VHAC, which advises the Minister of Health, and on the Defence Consultative Group, we have no delegate on the Veterans Advisory Council, VAC, which provides advice to the Premier and Minister for Veterans' Affairs. But we anticipate a more regular dialogue with Veterans SA, having met with its new (in April) Director and former RAAF Officer, Catherine Walsh. And we have engaged on many occasions with the so-called Consortium of SA ESOs under Bill Denny AM BM and Bill Hignett OAM. The advocacy of that group has been of major significance. Matters drawn to Government attention have included: an inequitable distribution of BEST funding; defects in service provision by Open Arms, formerly VVCS; loss of "charitable donations" to the aggressively marketed Queensland RSL Lottery; failure to activate surgery at the Repat; and review of the (DVA) National Consultation Framework. This informal group was previously active in submitting ideas and consensus opinions to the two major inquiries referred to above. It will provide several questions for the Premier to answer at his "Town Hall" event here on the 5th of November, that is next Thursday week.

The Governor and Mrs Le. It would be fair to say that our Association has been most graciously honoured by our Vice-Regal couple. Not only has His Excellency Hieu Van Le AC been regularly attentive at our commemorative events but his wise words and counsel have been warmly applauded. His charming wife, Lan, whose childhood experiences on a Vietnam Air base commanded by her father might explain a close affinity, has been most attentive. On two occasions she has rung to enquire of our health and wellbeing in this COVID year. She is a loyal and regular fan of Greg Weller's daily Facebook post. We will be disappointed that their appointment will cease next August. But I am confident of their support as AF 2021 takes hold.

Wings, Plane Connection and other means of Communication. We have two excellent and well-presented regular journals, National and State based. Greg ensures that our activities are recorded in the much improved "Wings". Bill Chappell's long-standing editorial guidance of the latter has been an outstanding service. It will continue even as he leaves the Council. But still we hear that members complain of a lack of communication. Please read them and benefit thereby; and let us know if they are not received. We also have Facebook with Greg's daily news, and a web site, diligently maintained by retiring Treasurer John Stapleton. Members have many means for learning what your Association is doing. In this State you will have a Council with a rather "new look". We shall retain some with long experience while gaining more affinity with a recent veteran group of serving members.

I shall be pleased and honoured to be your President for another year. Thank you for this privilege. To have two Deputies as knowledgeable and diligent as Dave Helman and Greg Weller is most encouraging. Warwick has by now settled well into the role of Secretary and Lawrence Ng, an Officer with the Air Force Cadets, will take over the Treasurer's responsible job with excellent professional credentials. We hope that 2021, the Centenary for the



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Service of which we are Alumni, may be interesting and free of the restrictions that a virus has imposed on us this year. It was a century ago that a pandemic, caused by different virus, similarly afflicted the globe, in the year of our Association's genesis.

Robert Black President, RAAF Association SA, 24th of October 2020.